



A Study of the Impact  
of Family Structure  
upon the Children of  
Rural Uttarakhand



# Child & the FAMILY

**SIDH**

Society for Integrated Development of Himalayas



## About **SIDH**

The Society for Integrated Development of Himalayas (SIDH) is based in Badrinagar, Garo, 12 kms from Mussoorie in the Central Himalayas. Since 1990, the journey at SIDH has been about negotiating issues through education, for a more meaningful exploration and dialogue, not only in social and political spheres, but also within individual members.

Education does not exist in a vacuum. It is situated in a social, political, economic and cultural context. Education influences and is influenced by the larger context in which it is located. SIDH has realised that unless the links of education with the larger context are explored and changes effected there in, no fundamental change can be brought about in education.

Starting with primary education, SIDH ventured into other areas of education by opening pre-primary schools, an elementary school and a high school. Instead of expanding by opening more schools of the same type, it decided to explore other segments of education like establishing a unique rural year residential course, organising several 7 - 10 day short courses for young people, equipping young men to become teachers, conducting research studies and holding seminars, workshops, publishing books and journals as part of its effort in advocacy to challenge the assumptions behind mainstream education and create an awareness about individual perceptions. Local youth are teachers in SIDH's schools. The primary schools are now managed by the local Village Education Committee. Each school has its own corpus fund, which makes them largely self-sufficient. Many young people inspired by the youth courses have taken their own initiative to open schools in their villages, setting up income generating units and taking an active role in resolving local issues instead of migrating to cities. SIDH has done pioneering work in developing innovative teaching-learning material in particular handbooks for teachers to help them teach various subjects by the making the local - physical and social - environment as the medium of transferring the knowledge.

At SIDH, we feel it is also important to challenge today's dominant notions of who is 'civilised', who is 'backward', or what is 'scientific' and what is 'rural'. We hope to enhance the self-esteem and self-confidence of our students through our experiments at Badrinagar, a space to explore and identify 'relevant' education, which includes:

- **Sujokila** : Village Education Centres
- **Sanjeevani & Sanjivani** : Youth Programmes
- **Sanyas** : Discussion forums with thinkers and activists from different fields
- **Sanshodhan** : Research
- **Satish** : An outreach program for teachers and students of primary schools
- **Sanskriti** : Advocacy
- **Vimarsa** : Out reach programme
- **Sanskrit** : Publications unit
- **Samsad** : Discussion forums with thinkers and activists from different fields
- **Sanskriti** : Income generation units and a retail outlet "Himalaya House"

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Anuradha and Pawan  
Mussoorie  
March 2004



**CHILD AND THE FAMILY: A Study of the Impact of Family  
Structure Upon Children in Rural Uttarakhand**

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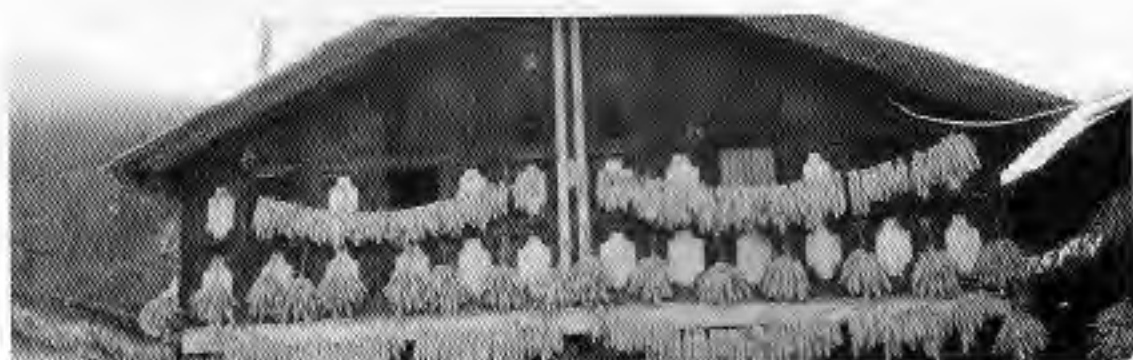
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# Contents

Recommendations .....	1
Executive Summary .....	4
Introduction .....	6
Impact of family structure upon the child .....	10
The adult perspective .....	18
Popular trends and changing patterns .....	26
Case study .....	38
Closing remarks .....	39
Methodology .....	42
Literature review .....	44
Appendix 1: Distinguishing features of each area chosen for study .....	45
Appendix 2: Details of sample groups used during Phases 1 and 2 .....	46
Appendix 3: Orientation and training of the research team .....	47
Appendix 4: Economic survey of families from seven villages in Jaunpur, Tehri .....	47
Appendix 5: Distribution of couples in families from thirty villages across Uttarakhand .....	48
Appendix 6: Groups of people favouring one family type over the other .....	48

## Definition of terms

**Joint family:** two or more married brothers staying together, or three generations living together within a household. Sometimes called "rural" or "large" families by academics.

**Nuclear family:** all other families

## Abbreviations

FGD Focused group discussions

SIDH Society for the Integrated Development of the Himalayas

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Academics and research institutions should:*

- conduct similar studies in other parts of rural India to determine whether the main findings of this report are validated: that joint families are better than nuclear families for the well being of their children, women, old and disabled members as well as the economic condition of the family. This can have far reaching implications in the enrolment, dropout rate and performance of the girl child as well as on the population and welfare policies of the state. [It is possible that the findings are similar in some areas and different in other areas. In that case the reasons for the difference must be further investigated like the effect of urbanisation, landlessness, increasing number of people leaving their traditional occupation and becoming daily wage earners etc.]
- find ways of including factors of well-being of different family members - including children, women, the old and the disabled - while measuring poverty and indices like the HDI ( Human Development Index).
- explore the influences and systems that are marginalizing rural people and pushing them out of joint families.
- explore if the breaking up of joint families contribute towards increased migration from rural areas to urban centres.
- conduct a critical analysis of primary and secondary school textbooks at the national level, to ascertain the underlying values and worldview imparted through these textbooks and the resulting impact on the rural lifestyles, confidence and self respect of the people, and recommend appropriate changes.
- conduct workshops with thinkers, NGOs and social scientists to explore ways of providing for the need of privacy, in joint families. The joint family structure, if modified to suit changing aspirations of the educated, may help in preventing the break-up of families, which is in the larger interest of the rural population.



*If other studies replicate the findings of this one, then the government should:*

- provide positive incentives to encourage joint families in rural areas to stay together, including taking steps to restore the traditional systems and self-esteem of these people.
- if other studies validate the findings of this study (that in rural areas children per couple in joint families are less than in nuclear families) then this must become an important factor while formulating policies on family welfare programmes and population control programmes. The present campaigns, which inadvertently promote nuclear families need to be discontinued and campaigns that promote joint families initiated.
- if disability is found less in joint families (as in this study) then this also must be taken into account in government policies and joint families must be encouraged to stay together.
- take steps to show the strengths of traditional family systems without glorifying them; initiate a campaign through the media to communicate the co-relation between joint families and prosperity / happiness of its members.
- include factors of well-being of different family members - including children, women, the old and the disabled - while measuring poverty.
- include the family structure as an important variable in collecting demographic data in all research studies specially those related to education.

*If other studies replicate the findings of this one, then state education department of the government of Uttarakhand and other states responsible for making curriculum, designing textbooks and providing training to teachers should:*

- adopt a curriculum with exercises and modules to develop the students' analytical and critical faculties to help them reach their own conclusions rather than the textbooks giving them information or making categorical statements that are full of urban bias and are sometimes in conflict with their own reality (e.g. 'small families are happy families').
- work towards an interdisciplinary approach in classroom teaching rather than compartmentalised teaching (segregation of different subjects). Rather than increasing subjects and textbooks each year effort must be made to reduce them. This can be done by integrating subjects.
- refrain from the top down approach where the teacher teaches and the child learns. Rather the approach should be of co-learners and explorers. The focus must be on learning rather than teaching (Perhaps constant use of the word '*learning*' instead of '*teaching*' and '*facilitators*' instead of '*teachers*' could draw attention to the distinctions and bring it to a conscious level). Discussions in the classroom need to be encouraged where there may not be definite answers every time but different perceptions to a given situation are shared and honoured between teachers and students.

- focus on understanding of objects, events or situations (case studies) and draw from the learning from different subjects to understand the issue under discussion, rather than merely gathering information.
- acknowledge the learning that takes place outside of school – at home, in community gatherings, in different situations that the child confronts and draw her attention to this process.
- encourage children to look at their local issues, customs and traditions analytically and find their strengths as well as their limitations.
- minimise the use of standardised curriculum. The curriculum should incorporate the knowledge of the local physical and social environment.<sup>1</sup>
- invite people from the local community to schools as resource persons. Such people include: craftsmen; village elders; and women and men having special skills and knowledge in the areas of traditional medicines, healing and child care, forestry, agriculture, traditional crops, preservation of seeds, usage and preparation of natural fertilisers, traditional knowledge about weather, etc. This will help instil a respect for traditional knowledge, and will enable children to differentiate between literacy and knowledge or education.
- include the issue of relationship as part of the school curriculum. The school should take practical steps towards imparting the value of justice. One of the objectives of the school should be to create responsible members who can enrol other members of the family towards the value of justice. This would go a long way in resolving conflicts, which breakup families and societies.

*Voluntary Organisations should:*

- those working in rural agrarian areas should have a dialogue with the community at two levels. (a) communicate the co-relation between joint families and the prosperity as well as happiness of its members (b) explore strategies to resolve the conflict between members by helping modify the structure of the joint family to suit the changing needs of the literate/modern/ younger members.



<sup>1</sup> A teachers' guideline, "Jaunpur ke Ped Paudhe" and "Tithis ki Samajh" prepared by SIDH to teach language and other subjects using the context of local trees and local history, could be an example of the steps required to achieve this.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Families in India can be broadly divided into two main types: nuclear families of husband and wife, and joint families of two or more married brothers, or three or more generations living together in one house. Joint families are considered to be the more traditional and nuclear families are considered to be the more modern.

Joint families are gradually disappearing even from rural India. More and more joint families are breaking up into nuclear family units. In Tehri, one of the areas studied in this report, the number of joint families has decreased fourfold in the last 40 years. This study set out to examine whether this is a good thing, by conducting qualitative surveys of adults and children, from both family types, living in the newly formed mountain state of Uttaranchal.

Its findings make for stark reading. Despite the fact that joint families are on the decrease in India, they come out as being better off than nuclear families in virtually every measure examined. In terms of the welfare of the children, joint families were found to provide an environment more conducive to studying, and had children that were more articulate, and performed better in school. Children from joint families were less likely to drop out of school than their nuclear family counterparts. Children from joint families did not appear to be over-worked and were in better physical health than those from nuclear families. They were also more culturally aware and proud of their heritage than children from nuclear families.

***"We can see clearly in our villages that people in large families can never be happy. The food from their fields is never sufficient for their needs. Children cannot do well in their studies because they have to work very hard from their childhood. But those who stay in small families can live happily, with even their small earnings and little work in the fields. Children from small families study well and are healthy."***

*Extract from a Class 3 Hindi textbook<sup>1</sup>, prescribed in government schools under the U.P. board (translated from Hindi). Its views are the exact opposite of the results of this study, that children in joint families fare better than their nuclear*

In terms of welfare of the adults, joint families were found to be better able to provide care for the old, disabled and sick family members. They were found to be more prosperous, both in terms of material wealth and the perceptions of others. The burden of work was less; in particular, there were more possibilities for women to take breaks from work in joint families. Having said this though, one of the reasons for the break up of joint families was that many feel that their personal freedom is restricted in joint families.

Reasons for the break-up of joint families included: the reduced influence of the *mukhiya* (head of the household); the lure of the market further aggravated by the media; sudden and large wind-fall of cash coming into the family; a member of the household leaving the traditional occupation and finding a job outside; women desiring privacy to be alone with their husbands; and increasing hierarchy of superior and inferior types of work, inadvertently promoted by modern education.

It is telling that in retrospect all the nuclear families interviewed during this study, deeply regretted the decision of breaking away from their families and felt that they had become poorer, lonelier, more miserable and overworked as a result of this.

These findings suggest that policy needs to be changed in order to reverse the trend for the break-up of joint families. Such break-up is leading not only to the problems listed above, but also to an increase in migration to urban areas and poverty.

In summary, we hope that this study will persuade the policy makers to take a fresh look at our traditions, and make the necessary adjustments so that we have a system that works for us all. In addition, we hope that people will adopt life-styles that are suited to their own culture, the demands of their occupations, lifestyles and economy, in order to become prosperous and happy.

At the very least, we hope that the study will establish the joint family as an important variable in research, and inspire scholars to start a series of investigations that explore the connections between family structures and occupations, prosperity, population growth, health, education and the well-being of all members, in particular of women and children.

The findings of the study are separated into three main sections. In the first section, the differences between children from joint and nuclear family backgrounds are shown, and in the second, the effects on adults are given. The third section concentrates on the changing trends in family systems in rural Uttaranchal, and the reasons for these changes. Variables such as age, sex, class, literacy, life experience, jobs and caste are highlighted when detailing the responses. Each section is concluded with a summary and a discussion, which elaborates some of the findings shown.

<sup>1</sup> Bharti G., "Basic Education Directorate," U.P. Board, 1999.



# Introduction

## INTRODUCTION

Since 1989, SIDH has been working to provide relevant education to the children and youth of the Jaunpur block of Tehri district in the state of Uttaranchal. During this period, we have remained in fairly close contact with the community, and have learnt much from them about education and life. In 1999, we conducted a study of peoples' views on schooling in Uttaranchal called *A Matter of Quality*<sup>1</sup>. This study revealed the gap between parents' expectations of their children's schooling and what was actually provided. We came to realise that modern education is creating a new system of belief in the minds of the people, which belies their experience and thus causes anxiety. The study also brought to light the new values and resulting illusions created by the school system. Through Sanshodhan, the research and advocacy wing of SIDH, we have attempted to analyze some of the dilemmas they face.

In the last six years, in five of the primary schools run by SIDH, 18 children dropped out before finishing school. At first sight, there did not appear to be any common link between these children: they were not all girls;<sup>2</sup> and they were not all from scheduled caste families.<sup>3</sup> However, an unexpected link did exist – they were all from nuclear families! We decided to explore this further, as we felt there may be a connection between children's well being and their family structure.

From the existing literature, it is clear why we, the 'educated', have mostly perceived the traditional joint family as a 'backward' system, and how this perception has been influenced by our colonial history. The nineteenth century anthropologists who studied Indian society were of the view that the joint family was a primitive institution and that the nuclear family of the West was more civilised. They believed that the West had reached a higher stage of 'evolution', the underlying assumption being that all societies have to traverse the same evolutionary path. Unfortunately, the same bias continues today, and has far-reaching implications for the study of family structure in India. In textbooks, the four types of families – the clan, the matrilineal joint family, the patrilineal joint family and the nuclear family – are said to reflect the four stages of evolution of the family system, which correspond to the four stages of social evolution. The clan corresponds to the family form that characterises the hunting and gathering phase of social evolution; the matrilineal family to the domestication of animals and simple horticulture; the patrilineal joint family characterises the more developed phase of agrarian economy; and the individual nuclear form corresponds to the modern industrial and urban phase of human existence<sup>4</sup>.

One can clearly trace the roots of this world-view to our colonial past. Once the British became political and military rulers of large territories in India, they began to pay close attention to those ancient Indian texts that interested them. One of them was Manu's *Dharmashastra*, popularly known as *Manusmriti*, which had been translated into English by about 1790. The Indological view of the Hindu family is largely derived from the British interpretation of the *Manusmriti*. The British "ignored the many different variations of domestic groups that existed among differ-



ent castes, communities and tribes in different parts of India.<sup>19</sup> Their conception of the joint family seems to have been influenced by the perception of Indologists; in particular, by the writings of Henry Maine in 1861, who regarded the form of the Hindu family, and all practices associated with it (such as adoption, primogeniture, the position of women in Indian society, and religious sanction of family law), as “archaic.” Due to Maine’s position as the Law Member of the Government of India (1862-1869), his view of the joint family – as an archaic structure – came to be accepted as the official Government view. This is reflected in the analysis of the Census Surveys that began around that time. Other reasons for this worldview include the fact that the British were here to rule: to ‘educate’ a certain class of people, who would then view the world (including their fellow countrymen), through the eyes of the British. This colonial mindset is the cause of the total rejection of many of our traditional systems, by our own anthropologists and sociologists, as ‘backward’, ‘uncivilised’ and ‘primitive’, and is still prevalent today.



India continues to be intellectually dominated by the texts, systems and institutions of scholarship established by the British during the

nineteenth century. As a result, those who formulate and administer Indian policies and manage our institutions continue to view India the way the British did; thus despite being a democracy, India still functions in the manner it did during the colonial rule. This must be by far the worst effect of colonialism, and the greatest tragedy for any free country. The most unfortunate consequence has been that such an administration has prevented an internal critique and correction of our traditional family systems, which could in turn highlight our natural path to modernity. Nowadays, we seem to confuse ‘modernity’ with ‘westernisation’, with resulting dilemmas in the lives of individuals, as will be shown in this study.

This is the second edition of the study first published in 2000, which generated a lot of debate and we were overwhelmed with a large number of responses. The general opinion was that the findings were significant and needed to be presented in a more readable manner. Accordingly we have made the report shorter, more focused and re-arranged it to make it more reader



friendly without tampering with the original findings in any way. We are really grateful to Rosie Sharpe and Edward Graham for their hard work and help in this regard.

In summary, we hope that this study will persuade the policy makers of our country to take a fresh look at our culture and heritage, and make the necessary adjustments so that we have a system that works for us all. In addition, we hope that our people will adopt life-styles that are suited to our own culture and economy, in order to become prosperous and happy. The present study has its limitations: it is restricted to being a qualitative study of the people living in Uttaranchal; hence the quantitative data are only incidental, and included for the sole purpose of supporting the qualitative data. However, at the very least, we hope that the study will establish the joint family as an important variable in research, and inspire scholars to start a series of investigations that explore the connections between family structures and prosperity, population growth, health, education and the well-being of all; in particular of women and children.

<sup>1</sup> Sanshodhan, SIDH, "A Matter of Quality," 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Of the 18 that dropped out, twelve were girls and six were boys.

<sup>3</sup> Of the 18 that dropped out, ten were from scheduled caste families, five boys and five girls.

<sup>4</sup> Sinsha D., "Joint Family in Tradition," *Seminar* 424, December 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Sinsha D., "Joint Family in Tradition," *Seminar* 424, December 1994.



**IMPACT OF FAMILY STRUCTURE ON THE CHILD**

This first phase of the study was spread over six areas in the five districts of Uttaranchal, and a total of 1,093 children and 253 adults (including 75 teachers) participated. Information was mainly gathered through focused group discussions (FGDs) and interviews with the children. This was supplemented by examination of school records and teachers' reports, liaison with adults, and completion of questionnaires, among others (see Methodology).

## KEY FINDINGS

**1. DROP OUTS:** Children from nuclear families appear to be more likely to drop out of school than children from joint families.

A survey of five primary schools of the Jaunpur block in Tehri revealed that, out of 238 children in the past six years, there were 18 drop-outs (12 girls and six boys), who were all from nuclear



families. Of these 18 children, ten (five girls and five boys) were from the scheduled caste and the rest (seven girls and one boy) were from other castes. It is possible that this is a consequence of there being fewer people in nuclear families, and therefore children are more likely to be needed to help with farming and other household chores.

*"I want to send my children to school, but cannot do so as I am alone. Who would then help in cutting grass for the buffalo, and how would we survive?"*

*(45-year-old man from a nuclear family in Jaunpur)*

*"In nuclear families, only well-off people can afford to send their children to school."*

*(25-year-old man from a joint family)*

**2. PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL:** Children from joint families generally perform better at mathematics, language and general knowledge, and are more articulate than those from nuclear families.<sup>1</sup>

The feeling among those interviewed was that the atmosphere in a joint family home is more conducive to learning, as the work burden is far less – on both adults and children – in joint families. "Children can study better in a joint family. In a nuclear family, the children have to do so much work. They don't get any free time" was a common response.

<sup>1</sup> Shown by examination of teachers' reports.



***"Children in joint families grow up effortlessly and can study easily. (Pal bhi jate hain aur padh bhi jate hain.)"***

*(A 60-year-old woman from a joint family in Jaunpur)*

***"We can study better because there are better opportunities to study. With so many people around, a lot of information is exchanged, which helps us in class... There are many people who can help us with our difficulties and problems in a joint family."***

*(11 year old girl from a joint family)*

***"We have no problems going to school, because there are so many children going from the same house and we all know each other."***

*(10 year old boy from a joint family)*



**3. WELL BEING :** Most people, children, adult, male and female, think that children in joint families are better looked after, and in better health, than those from nuclear families. Children from joint families tended to score higher for cleanliness and health than those from nuclear families.<sup>1</sup>

*Dekh reh* was the phrase most commonly used by parents and teachers when referring to the physical well being of the child; it actually encompasses health (both physical and mental), hygiene and nutrition. The responses indicated that children have better *dekh reh* in joint families because there is generally someone assigned to ensure their welfare. All of the nuclear family children also mentioned food and the fact it was often lacking e.g., "Children from nuclear families often have to go hungry (*kbali pet bhna hota hai*), because nuclear families are usually poor." Significantly, children from joint families did not comment on food.

***"When my grandson fell ill, we had no problems. But if he had been in a nuclear family, then who would have gone to the chhani (cow-shed), who would have worked at home and who would have fetched the doctor?"***

*(A 58-year-old man from a joint family)*

***"Children are better looked after in joint families because there is always a special person - like a grandfather or grandmother - to take care of the children."***

*(A 34-year-old man from a joint family)*

<sup>1</sup> Shown by reports from the ten schools.





***"In nuclear families, very young girls take care of their siblings. How can children know how to look after children?"***

*(A 40-year-old woman from a nuclear family)*

***"Grandparents are more loving than parents who are overworked. Children in joint families are more loving and tolerant than those from nuclear families."***

*(A 20-year-old from a nuclear family)*

The emotional needs of children appear to be better fulfilled in a joint family, due to the presence of grandparents, which in turn moulds a positive disposition and good temperament. An earlier survey<sup>1</sup>, conducted in the Jaunpur block of the Tehri district, revealed a significant difference in the incidence of disability among children from joint and nuclear families. The percentage of joint family children who were disabled (1.51%) was less than half that of the nuclear family children (3.56%)..

#### **4. WORK BURDEN:** Children from nuclear families have to do more household chores than those from joint families

***"We have to work because there is no one else to help our family."***

*(Child from a nuclear family)*

***"As all children help equally in the house, we do not mind and quite enjoy it. If we are told to do the work once, it becomes our everyday duty."***

*(Child from a joint family)*



<sup>1</sup> Sanshodhan, SIDH, "Survey on Incidence of Disability in Jaunpur Block, Tehri District," 2001.

**5. FEARS AND FEELINGS:** Children from nuclear families feel more lonely, insecure and fearful than those from joint families. “Children from nuclear families feel more insecure because they do not get much love, as there are few people in the house, who are mostly busy. In nuclear families, there is no one to intervene when the parents quarrel,” was a typical parental response. When the children themselves were interviewed, the responses of those from joint families were generally positive, e.g.: “Our problems often get solved by some family member. We have a lot of people to help us” and “We live in a big house and people respect us in the village. Members of joint families get a lot of support when they are in trouble.”



***“We have a lot of playmates in the house: we eat together, play together and have fun. The house seems lonely without people.”***

*(Child from a joint family)*

***“We all eat the food from the same chulha (stove), and are really close to each other. We share our problems and joys with one another. (Sukh dukh mein saath dete hain.)”***

*(Child from a joint family)*

We asked the children to write stories about a difficult incident in their homes. The majority of the children from nuclear families wrote about traumatic events such as when a father, mother or brother was seriously ill, had had an accident, or had died, and the consequent difficulties in getting timely help. Some others wrote about problems related to poverty or debt, or betrayal by a friend of the family, or about a quarrel between parents. A common theme among all these stories was the way in which they showed a certain helplessness and loneliness on the part of the child; a high level of anxiety was noticeable. From the joint family children, the stories were about situations such as quarrels between family members (although never between parents), or when a traditional healer was called to exorcise a family member possessed. Moments of deep anxiety and trauma, and feelings of terror or helplessness, were not detected from the narratives of these children from joint families, perhaps indicating that they live in a more secure world.

**6. BEHAVIOUR:** By observing the children through FGDs and role-plays, we were able to gain some insight into their personalities. During the FGDs, we observed the nuclear family children to be somewhat contemptuous of others; quotes such as “We don’t want to work with our hands. The illiterate will work in the fields (*Anpadh kanga kheti*)” and “Farming is the job of the foolish, illiterate people, not of people like us” illustrate this point. These children spoke of family relations primarily from a utilitarian perspective; as one of them said, “I only need my brother’s help in a crisis, not his interference everyday.” They also displayed a tendency to say things that would please others, rather than those they actually believed in, and would often contradict themselves later on. For example, they spoke of the importance of being together in a joint family, but also





said that it is better to substitute relatives (in a joint family) with neighbours who could give the required support.

On the other hand, such tension was not seen among children from joint families, who often spoke with ease and volunteered information spontaneously, giving examples to illustrate what they said. Initiative and leadership in conceiving and directing role-play was also noticed more among these children, who appear to have more self-esteem, and show greater qualities of spontaneity and honesty. The teachers' reports revealed that these children are generally more confident and co-operative.

The adults used the phrase "this child has *sanskars*" to express wisdom in a child. They felt that children from joint families attain *sanskars* naturally, since children learn by observing and imitating adults; joint families thus offer greater scope for this, as there are more adults around, in particular grandparents.

The role-plays performed by the children confirmed that they attain *sanskars* by observing the behaviour of adults at home. The children were given fifteen minutes to enact a typical scene from their families. For the joint family children, these often centred on the role and responsibility of the head of the family, or *mukhiya*. In the role-play, the family members were shown to have respect for the *mukhiya*, and to listen to his advice about the sharing of work, money or material goods. In turn, the *mukhiya* was clearly cognisant of the needs of each member of the family when managing the affairs of the household. These role-plays also depicted daughters-in-law supporting each other by dividing the work amongst themselves, and women deciding among themselves when each of them would take time off to go to their *maika* (mother's home). Such role-plays are good illustrations of how keenly children imitate adults, and show how a child's behaviour is shaped by the environment in which they live.



***"Children imitate whatever the adults do in the family. If they see wise and elderly people in the family, they too become wise."***

*(An 18-year-old girl from a nuclear family)*

***"It is only in joint families that children get *sanskars*. This is because there are grandparents who have the time and wisdom to pass it on to the next generation."***

*(A 25-year-old woman from a nuclear family.)*

Many people mentioned the positive impact of grandparents on the upbringing of children; one girl in particular described how her grandfather often told the children stories of the pre-independence days, and how he had protested against injustice. In addition, there was a general feeling



that girls from joint families are preferred as brides, since they can get along better with other family members and people in the village, and adjust better to changes – “*khat sakti hain, sab sakti hain*.” They were seen as more tolerant and flexible than girls from rich nuclear families, who were considered to be a little spoilt and self-centred; those from poorer nuclear families were seen as hard-working, how-

Finally, it was the majority opinion that children from less well off nuclear families are more *anushasit*, or disciplined, than those from joint families, where other family members may indulge the children a little. Among joint families, there was a difference in the perception of children and adults. Children often felt that they learnt to be disciplined, as someone always stays in the house and punishes them if they make mistakes or do something wrong. The adults, however, believed that disciplining was more difficult in a joint family due to the fact that they cannot control the children by scolding or beating as some uncle or aunt intervenes on behalf of the child. This seems to indicate that the children from nuclear families are more ‘obedient’, rather than ‘disciplined’. Discipline is a quality that must ultimately stem from within; it cannot be imposed from outside. One can be made to be obedient through fear, however.

**7. CULTURAL AWARENESS:** Cultural awareness and tradition: Children from joint families tend to know more about local culture than those from nuclear families. The joint family children knew 14 types of folk songs and dances (out of a total of 17 types of folk songs in Jaunpur<sup>1</sup>), whereas the children from nuclear families knew just five. Children from joint families also seem to know much more about local festivals, and are more aware of traditional medicines and home remedies. They have a higher self-esteem and are clearly not embarrassed by their family structure, use of their local dialect, traditional occupations, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Sanshodhan, SIDH, “Myths, Legends and Folk Songs of Jaunpur,” 1997.



**“We really like it when our grandmother or grandfather talks to us in ‘our language’ (the local dialect)”**

(Child from a joint family)

**“We feel ashamed to feed our guest with mandua roti” (mandua is a local grain which is nutritious but considered coarse)**

(Child from a nuclear family)

**“Our mother should wear the ghagra (long skirt which is the traditional dress). It is our custom.”**

(Child from a joint family)

**“I like it when my mother wears a salwar kameez, not a ghagra.”**

(Child from a nuclear family)



## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Although innumerable studies have been conducted to explore the factors responsible for children dropping out of school, to our knowledge none have highlighted the connection between drop-outs and family structure in the rural context. The most significant finding in this phase of the study was that children from nuclear families are more likely to drop out of schools than children from joint families. It is very important to validate this conclusion with a study from a larger sample group of children, because it has significant implications; especially for the female child. Joint family children also tend to perform better in school, since their homes provide an atmosphere more conducive to learning; those from nuclear families are often burdened with excessive housework, which prevents sufficient time from being spent on their studies.

Children from joint families were found to be in better physical health, and also more at ease, articulate and expressive. They tend to be more culturally aware and proud of their traditions than those from nuclear families. Most of the children from joint families have grandparents who spoke in the local dialect; it is a well-known fact that familiarity with the local dialect enriches vocabulary and aids creative expression and thinking, which then facilitates language skills. Grandparents are also a perennial source of indigenous knowledge, which increases the self-esteem of the child, resulting in a positive personality. The importance of *santkars* and the role of grandparents in developing positive personality traits are also evident.

Relationships are important for the emotional and social growth of the child. In a joint family, there are more people to relate to, providing children with many opportunities to develop rich relationships in a secure environment. For some time now, psychologists have been talking of the importance of the emotional quotient, or EQ, saying that the aim of education should also be to enhance a child's EQ. The present study shows that the children from joint families are more likely to grow up to be stable, secure, honest, tolerant and co-operative as a result of their supportive family background.



## THE ADULT PERSPECTIVE

In this second phase of the study, we interviewed adults in the various villages in order to ascertain their feelings towards the different family types, and the effects each one has on individual and family life.

## KEY FINDINGS

The findings in this section have been organised into five categories: (1) prosperity, (2) division of work, (3) care of family members, (4) social status, and (5) freedom.

### 1. PROSPERITY

(A) Material wealth: The majority of people, both from nuclear and joint families, were of the view that people in joint families are wealthier than those in nuclear families. This view is also substantiated by an economic survey of 150 households in seven villages of the Jaunpur block in Tehri (see Methodology section). All of the poor families in the villages were found to be nuclear families, whereas majority of the well-off families were found to be joint families; out of a total of 32 prosperous families, only three were nuclear families, while the rest were joint families. In addition, the average asset value per capita in joint families was found to be significantly higher than that of a nuclear family, while the average monthly cash expenditure per capita is lower (see Appendix 4). Thus it is very clear that, in rural areas, prosperity and the joint family system go together, and nuclear families are more dependent on cash than joint families.

(B) Perceptions of wealth: In addition to material wealth, there is a need to understand how the people themselves perceive prosperity, or *samriddhi*, since it is quite different from the way those of us in urban areas understand it. No one described *samriddhi* only in terms of money; in fact, the majority of both men and women older than 50 gave a non-monetary definition. Every time the word '*samriddhi*' was used, it was meant both in the material sense and in terms of the number of people in the family, and the support they derive from each other. Children were often referred to as "wealth." *Samriddhi* was used to include not only material items such as land and cattle, but also the prestige or name a family has in the community, the number of members in the family, community resources such as temples and forests, etc. Even when people younger than 25 spoke of *samriddhi*, they used words like prosperity, happiness and affection etc. Most of the elderly men and women also associated *samriddhi* in villages with physical effort or labour. One reason for poverty, voiced by a number of people, was that, "We are becoming poor because we are unwilling to work hard in the fields."



When talking of *samriddhi*, the stress was on having *enough* rather than having a lot: on sufficiency rather than excess. The majority of the respondents said that traditionally a joint family is called prosperous when it fulfils the *minimum requirements* of food, shelter and clothes for all members. One woman said, "At least no one goes hungry in a joint family. In a joint family everyone gets food, clothes and bedding. But yes, there cannot be 'good' food and 'good' clothes for all." Some of the women even made a distinction between *samriddhi* and income. According to them, happiness is one of the necessary ingredients of prosperity, and an increase in (cash) income does not necessarily mean an increase in *samriddhi*. One elderly woman said, "It is not necessarily the case that cash increases the wealth of the family. I know of many men who sell their milk while their children don't get milk. The father spends all his earnings on drinking and other things and gets into debt." Thus an increase of cash income can even lead to a depletion of *samriddhi*, since it increases the lure of the market, prompting unrealistic aspirations which lead to greedy desires for 'good' food and 'good' clothes.

(C) Togetherness: Another important factor concerning prosperity that emerged was togetherness, or *ikaththe rabna*. Many people stressed the need to stay together to assure a good quality of life, as one 43-year-old man from the Nainital district said, "The more people in the family, the more we can produce." On the other hand, a 52-year-old man from Balganga defined a poor family as, "A family that has very few (or disabled) people, does not have land and has little food." The majority of respondents agreed with the statement of a 28-year-old woman from Jaunpur who said, "The family becomes poor when there is a division of property." Thus, a joint family will always be more prosperous than a nuclear family.

**2. DIVISION OF WORK:** In the rural context of agriculture and animal husbandry there are innumerable tasks to be done. The division of work that takes place in a joint family ensures that there is no excessive work burden on any single individual.

***"Everything is taken care of in a joint family, the forest as well as the home (ban bhi aur ghar bhi)."***

*(A 60-year-old woman from a joint family)*

***"Work gets done painlessly when done together. In a joint family, someone looks after the children, another the animals, someone gets wood and someone else gets grass. Someone cooks, someone gets water, while someone else washes."***

*(A 45-year-old woman from a joint family)*



**"In a nuclear family, a woman is always irritable because of the excessive burden of work."**

*(A 22-year-old unmarried youth)*

**"I have two daughters. I had one daughter married into a joint family. She is happy. The second daughter was married into a nuclear family. She is very lonely and unhappy, because she has to do all the work. She keeps saying, 'Why did you marry me into a nuclear family?'"**

*(A 52-year-old mother from Garur)*



The researchers reported that the women from nuclear families were often irritable and bitter during interviews. This may be because, as the majority expressed, in nuclear families there is so much work that the women "have neither the *bash* [consciousness] nor the time even to lift their heads, never mind cook good meals or go out with their husbands."



**3. CARE OF FAMILY MEMBERS:** (A) The elderly: All the men and women over 50 years of age prefer the joint family system, where they feel more secure and protected. Generally speaking, the elderly need more care and attention than other adults; which can be more easily provided in a joint family.

**"A joint family has a large shadow (*Bade parivark ki badi chhaya*)."** i.e., it can take care of many people of all ages : from the very young to the very old.

*(An old man of 70 from Jaunpur)*

**"Old people are physically weak; they need care, and someone to fetch things for them or help them to walk. In a joint family there is always someone available to take care of the old people. One person gives them a bath and another asks them to eat."**

*(A 26-year-old man from Garur)*

**"Old people get into a real mess in nuclear families. (In parivaron mein hamare fajite hote hain.) Look at me: I have to sit and mind the fields at my age. Had I been in a joint family, I would have been resting comfortably at home."**

*(A 70-year-old woman)*

**"If I never get any relief from my work, what sewa (service) can I give the old people at home?"**

*(A 27-year-old woman from a nuclear family in Kausani)*

**"Who has the time in the nuclear family to look after old people? There is so much work all the time."**

*(A 22-year-old man from Nainital)*



**(B) Women: Joint families are particularly supportive of women.**



**"It is only in a joint family that a woman can truly be at peace, because she knows that her children are being well looked after by the elders in the family."**

*(A 52-year-old woman from Garur)*

**of grass, my younger brother-in-law fetches my medicine, my mother-in-law meanwhile looks after the cooking and I get time to rest. I cannot imagine this happening in a nuclear family."**

*(A 56-year-old woman from a joint family)*

**"We get no rest, and have to work even when we are ill."**

*(A 35-year-old woman from a nuclear family in Jaunpur)*

**"Nobody is going to take care of us when we grow old."**

*(A 30-year-old woman from a nuclear family in Jaunpur)*



**"The woman from a nuclear family has somehow to force herself to get up even when she is very ill. She has to take care of her cattle and her children. What do children understand about illness? They only ask for food. Even if she has no strength, she has to crawl (ghis ghis ke) to the stove and cook something for them."**

*(A 52-year-old woman from Garur)*







**4. SOCIAL STATUS:** Both children and adults claimed that, in any village, joint families enjoy a large amount of social prestige, and far more than that of nuclear families. One major reason for the respect joint families received from the people in their villages is that one can approach a joint household for help at any time, since they are generally wealthier and have more resources: "Joint families can be approached at any time for help because their doors are always open and welcoming, whereas the doors of a nuclear family are always closed." They are also seen as more powerful, as some members proudly stated, "Nobody can take on [a fight with] a joint family."

Another source of kudos for joint families is having time for hospitality, as described by the following quote: "A lot of guests come and go in a joint family. A home which has frequent visitors will always get more respect." In sharp contrast, nuclear families are often unable to take part in important social functions in the village, due to a lack of time. Perhaps the biggest reason for the respect of joint families, though, is the unity and co-operation among family members. "Joint families are considered to be special because they are together, and because they listen to their elders. They are together but are also engaged in different types of work such as agriculture and tending cattle."

**"Whoever has four sons, four daughters-in-law and four buffaloes has a durbar like Raja Ram. They are bound to be happy if they are together."**

(A 65 year old man from Garur)



**5. FREEDOM:** Opinions were widely divided on the issue of personal freedom. Many women stated that joint families do not allow them to do their *manmarzi*, or will. *Manmarzi* was given a wide range of meanings: from going where they please, doing the work they prefer, fulfilling their material desires, to emotional needs such as the need for privacy. The comments of these women generally contained a note of complaint about the curtailment of individual freedom, as imposed by the joint family, to spend time and money (in the market) in the manner of their choosing. The desire to "go out with my husband alone" was also expressed many times during discussions with these women, which is very difficult in a joint family. "How can I say that I want to go out with my husband, in front of my brother-in-law (*devar/jeth*)?" expresses their frustration.



On the other hand, some women thought of freedom as being able to rest when they were unwell, or do less work if they felt like it. Above all, the ability to take small breaks away from home, like going to the *maika* or the *mela* [local fair], was seen as very important. One common complaint of women from nuclear families was that they never get the opportunity to go to their *maika* or the *mela*.

Although the men were not so vocal on this issue, the general feeling was that men from joint families are more free than those from nuclear families. A few said quite categorically, "It is only in a joint family that we have the freedom to go out and work, or be with friends or attend meetings. Otherwise, men are always anxious about their wives and children back home." However, others also defined freedom as "being able to keep my earnings" i.e., for themselves, which is not generally possible in a joint family, where resources are usually shared.

There was a significant gender difference for those aged 50 years and upwards.

Women above 50 defined freedom as being able to do as they please (e.g. being able to go to their *maika*), while men over 50 made no comment about freedom, perhaps because it is no longer an issue for them.



***"Whatever I want never happens. I can never go where I please. Whatever the in-laws say is the law of the house. I feel scared all the time."***

*(Woman from a joint family)*



## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Joint families are seen as more prosperous by the majority of people, and our small-scale study of the Jaunpur region indicates that they also have more material wealth. This leads to an enhanced social standing within the village, which is cemented by the fact that they often use their resources to help other families in need; they also have many guests. The burden of work is understandably less in a joint family, on account of there being more people around to share it, and support one another if one member falls ill. Similarly, physical care of vulnerable family members is better provided in joint families.

The issue of freedom is less clear-cut, and prompted the only real criticisms of joint families given by adults. In a relationship-centred culture like in India, the individual identity is bound by an intensely emotional and intimate relationship with the family – an identity that is called '*huen*' or 'we' more often than 'I'. In terms of having the time to do things other than work, there is certainly more freedom in a joint family, on account of the greater number of family members to share the work-load. If freedom is defined as the ability to fulfil individual desires, however, then conditions within a joint family are undoubtedly a hindrance. Many women were under the impression that they would be able to do their *marmarzi* if they lived alone with their husbands, and thus avoid the "domination of another woman's will upon your own." There was a noticeable gender divide on this issue, with men preferring the joint family for the freedom it gives them to go out without feeling guilty about leaving their wife and children, who will be in the company of other family members. A key difference, however, is that men can go out of the house and be with their friends whenever they so desire; it is less acceptable for women to go out without their husbands. In short, although both men and women enjoy a certain kind of freedom in a joint family, it is limited. The majority of women said that they still felt stifled in a joint family, despite the fact that they were less burdened with work.



## Popular Trends and Changing Patterns

This third and final stage of the study concentrates on the trends and changes in family structure that have occurred over the last 35 years, and explores some of the reasons for these changes.

## KEY FINDINGS

The findings in this section have been organised into five categories: (1) family size, (2) people's preferences (for a particular type of family), (3) numbers of each type of family, (4) reasons for the break-up of joint families, and (5) effects of the break-up of joint families.

**1. FAMILY SIZE:** During this study we realised that people often do not make a clear distinction between the concepts of family size and structure. As a result, joint families tend to be labelled as large while nuclear families are called small, giving rise to certain misconceptions. Generally speaking, a 'large' family is one having a large number of children; this is not the same as a joint family, which is defined by the number of brothers or generations living together in a single household. In fact, our survey of 30 villages from all five areas of interest revealed that in a joint family there are on average fewer children per couple than in a nuclear family. It also showed that joint families are more likely to have no children at all (see Appendix 5).



In discussions with our research team, people in the villages gave several reasons for this difference between joint and nuclear families. One of the main causes of large numbers of children in a family is the desire to have a son. In joint families, the sons (or children) of other couples are considered as belonging to the entire family, rather than exclusively to the child's parents; it is quite common to find one couple with two daughters living without much dissatisfaction with another who have a son. Another reason may be that nuclear families in rural areas engaged in farming activities require more working hands; hence the need to have more children in nuclear families, where there are fewer adults.

**2. PEOPLE'S PREFERENCES:** During discussions with children and adults alike, we asked each of them which type of family system they would prefer to live in, if they had the choice. The responses are divided into those from children and those from adults (see Appendix 6).



(A) Children: The majority of children outside of the Tehri district prefer nuclear families, whereas those within Tehri prefer the joint family system. Many people in Tehri are still largely dependent on traditional agriculture for survival; they have very few jobs and hence a negligible cash economy, so their children do not have much cash to spend, and are less exposed to the media. On the other hand, children from Almora and Pithoraghar are largely from nuclear families where people have salaried jobs. Children from Nainital are also primarily from nuclear families engaged in farming with the emphasis on cash crops, and are relatively wealthier than their counterparts in other areas.

The reasons given by children who prefer nuclear families can broadly be categorised as: those relating to family; what they learn in school; and external influences such as the market and the media. We now give details of each of these in turn.



*The family.* Personal discomfort and inter-familial discord were cited by many children as detrimental effects of joint families: "Too many people in the house also means a lot of noise. We prefer a nuclear family because there is less *balla-gulla* [noise] and disorganisation in the house." Other reasons given by children include: jealousy and misunderstandings created in the hearts of family members; violence at home; a lack of trust; difficulties in keeping all the family members satisfied; quarrels between women; a family member wanting the best for their own children, and being unjust to the other children.

*What they learn in school.* Children learn both consciously and unconsciously, and pick up certain values from their environment in school and elsewhere. During this study, children often repeated the popular slogan, "*chota parivar sukhi parivar*" which means, "a small family is a happy family." This slogan has entered almost every household in India, thanks to decades of effort put in by the Ministry of Family Welfare in India in popularising it, under the family planning program (a euphemism for population control). In addition, under the current population control programme, there is a picture showing a nuclear family with the same caption – "*chhota parivar sukhi parivar*." The message conveyed is that a nuclear family has fewer children and is happier; both of these statements are in direct contradiction to our findings in this study.

*External influences.* Although it was not openly said by the children, what came across clearly as the major reason for preferring a nuclear family is the lure of the market, since the possibility of



getting “goodies” from the bazaar is far greater in a nuclear family than a joint family. As said earlier in this study nuclear families are far more dependent on cash than joint families. There were some mild regional variations in children’s expectations from the market (and from nuclear families in general), although food (and especially sweets) was always high on the list. Furthermore, it is easy to see the strong links between their desires and advertisements in the media. Children from Dharchula in the Pithoragarh district appear completely in the grip of the market, making statements like, “The necessary things in life are Maggi noodles, ice-cream and chocolate” and “We want to stay in a happy family where you get what you want (*jahan manmanji milata hai*). A happy family has a fridge, telephone, T.V., mixer, tape... etc.”

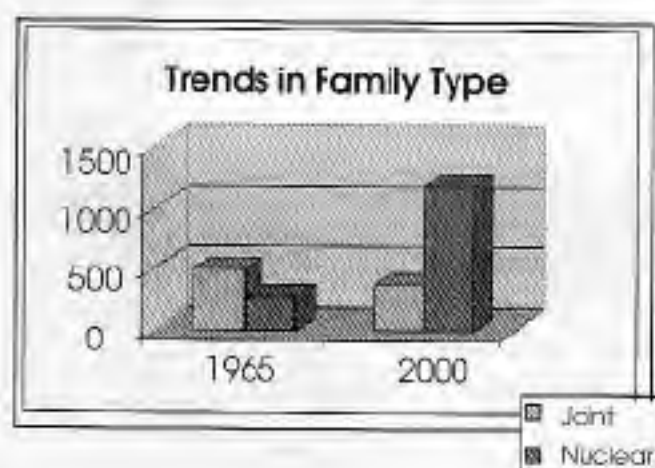
(B) Adults: All men and women above 50 said that they prefer joint families, as do most married men and women from Tehri. Surprisingly, the majority of the young, unmarried men and women from most regions also prefer the joint family system. Amongst women and married couples, however, there are strong preferences for nuclear families; in particular, amongst young married couples, far more females prefer the nuclear family system than males.

The responses of adults varied according to their region, livelihood patterns, age, marital status and gender. Caste was not found to affect the responses in any way, however. We discuss two of the variations below.

*Regional differences due to livelihood patterns.* In nuclear families, one can see a connection between salaried jobs, urbanisation, an increased dependence on cash economy, and life-style. On the other hand, in joint families there is a relationship between people who are largely dependent upon agriculture and other traditional means of livelihood, their dependence on non-monetary economy, and their life-style. So, at one end of the spectrum we have responses from areas near Dharchula where, because of their Scheduled Tribe status, the people have benefited from the reservation policy by getting various government jobs. The young men, women and children have become completely urbanised, with quotes such as “Happiness is possible in a nuclear family where there is a T.V., tape, cassette, jeans, watch, gas stove, suitcase, and gold ear-rings” indicative of their feelings. At the other end of the spectrum, we have people from the Tehri district (both Jaunpur and Balganga Ghati) where the people depend upon land for their survival and literacy levels are comparatively low. These people have less cash, prefer joint families and subscribe to traditional values: one can still meet a young woman whose most valuable and favourite possession is a buffalo.



*Differences due to marital status and gender.* The presence or absence of husbands can affect the manner in which women are treated by other members of the family, and thus define their preferences. In Jaunpur, Tehri, where the men have not yet migrated and are present at home, married women prefer the joint family system. In the Almora and Bageshwar districts, where men have migrated and taken a salaried job elsewhere, married women prefer nuclear families. In Nainital, however, where men are also present at home, both men and women prefer the nuclear family system; so the issue is not clear-cut. Married men often prefer joint families, as they feel more secure about the safety of their wives and children while they are absent from their homes. It is also clear that wherever the people are dependent upon land and labour, and wherever the young unmarried men are still around (perhaps because there are no jobs available), as in the Tehri district, these young men also prefer joint families, because in joint families heavy labour can be shared. In Pithoragarh, Almora and Bageshwar, where the young unmarried men are absent, the young unmarried women prefer to stay in joint families, so that their household chores can be shared.



**3. TREND TOWARDS NUCLEAR FAMILIES :** A small survey in 25 villages of the Tehri district was carried out to compare the numbers of joint and nuclear families in 2000 with those in 1965. The results are shown in the bar chart. In thirty-five years, the total number of families has doubled, with nuclear families increasing nearly four and a half times, but the number of joint families decreasing. This proves beyond doubt that, in Tehri at least, the trend is from joint families towards nuclear families; that is, despite their widespread advantages, joint families are breaking up and dividing into nuclear families.

**4. REASONS WHY JOINT FAMILIES BREAK UP :** Traditionally the break-up of families had simply to do with size; if the family became too big, it was natural to divide it into smaller units. According to the elderly, this decision was always taken collectively, with no trauma or shame attached. Currently there are many reasons for the break-up of joint families. The main ones can be divided into two broad categories: those that have always existed, which are largely to do with interpersonal problems; and those that have been created or aggravated by modern perceptions of what is desirable in society. These categories are not exclusive, and influence each other.





(A) Reasons that have always existed: Human frailties like jealousy, partiality and laziness are behind many a discord. These generally pertain to the distribution of work and family politics: for example, when one couple in the family discriminates between their children and the other children.



In joint families, the *mukhiya* has traditionally played a crucial role in keeping the family together by anticipating and resolving disputes before they develop into major quarrels. A strong *mukhiya* who was firm, wise and just could ensure the family stayed together; on the other hand, a weak *mukhiya* who was easily influenced, or had favourites, could be disastrous for the family, ultimately causing its disintegration.

(B) Newly created reasons: From what we were told, it seems that *mukhiyas* are less able to effectively settle disputes stemming from modern causes. For instance, if one brother in the family takes a salaried job while the other brothers are involved in traditional occupations, and starts "keeping his earnings separately in his pocket" instead of sharing it with the family, the resultant changes and ensuing conflicts and politics are often left unresolved by the *mukhiya*. This particular situation did not arise before, when all were engaged in non-monetary work.

The media are another major factor in the separation of joint families, in particular since the advent of television advertising. The lure of the market raises *individual* aspirations and desires in people. Joint families work on the principle of "enough for everyone", and so individual desires have to be restrained to a considerable extent. Problems then arise when members of joint families opt for salaried jobs, since the money earned is perceived as personal income for the individual, as opposed to the joint property of the family. Many young farmers gave this as one of the reasons for the break-up of the joint family: "The money my brother earns from his job is his own, he can do what he likes with it. My earnings are not in cash, but in kind: things we all consume in the house. Even if I can sell the produce and earn cash, the money is not my own. My wife and family members who have helped in the fields have a right to that money."

Sometimes discord is caused by a sudden, large windfall of cash. One such instance was the case when compensation was given to the displaced families at the site of the dam over Yamuna in Jaunpur, whose land became submerged. An unexpected influx of cash can disrupt the lives of people who are not used to handling large amounts of money: they can end up spending it on frivolous items (television, clothes etc.), stirring competition among the couples within the family.

There was a general feeling that one of the major causes of the break-up of joint households is at the instigation of women; in particular, those desiring the freedom to spend time alone with their husbands, as discussed earlier. Both men and women felt that possessiveness is a problem for women in a joint family: "A woman wants her husband to look at only her, talk to only her; not to listen or speak to anyone else" and "When women stay in a nuclear family they are at peace (*alag bhagar mahilaon ko tasalli ho jati hai*)" illustrate this well. The freedom of women in joint families is a very contentious issue, and often the cause of strife among family members, which, in the ex-



treme, leads to separation. Women also initiate the break-up of joint families because of a desire to provide better food and clothes for their children, since they are then not bound by the impressions of other family members.

Finally, modern education has resulted in a higher level of literacy in the villages, and consequently a conflicting system of values concerning the hierarchy of work. This is also particularly relevant to the women within the family. Previously, out-door work such as farming, collecting fuel and fetching water had a special significance in the rural economy of the hills, which everyone appreciated; thus women generally preferred to work outside the home, since this gained them respect, as well as allowing them to be with nature for some of the day. These days, however, the literate daughter-in-law tends to see such out-door work as demeaning to her intelligence, and thus prefers to be a *gharyati*, or woman who works inside the home. This tendency is perceived as laziness by the family elders, which can lead to resentment: "Earlier we got non-literate but hard working brides. Today we get literate, lazy ones." The majority also believe that the literate person cannot work as hard as the non-literate one, as they are simply not accustomed to it; as an elderly woman said, "How can the hand that held a pen for so many years efficiently hold a *daranti* [sickle]?" Men's aspirations have also changed in this manner, as an elderly man said: "The current education has given us two *jatis* [or caste /categories] of work: superior and inferior. The most superior work for men in the rural areas is a desk job, preferably with the government, which earns a cash income. Inferior work is done with ones'



## 5. EFFECTS OF THE BREAK UP OF JOINT FAMILIES: "Rich farmers turn into poor labourers"

To gauge the effects of the break-up of joint families in rural areas, we collected nine case studies of nuclear families that had separated from joint families. We found that all of them were unhappy and regretted the decision; the reasons for breaking away were more to do with jobs, cash, market etc. rather than inter-personal problems; and all of the resulting families were economically weaker than before. It was found that most families in rural areas where the economy is dependent on traditional occupations like agriculture) become poorer as their dependency upon the market increases, which inevitably happens when they become nuclear families. Even children understand the process clearly, as one child said very simply, "When joint families break up, people become poorer. Rich farmers turn into poor labourers."



When members of nuclear families were asked directly whether they had fulfilled the desires that had triggered the break-up, the answers were always vehemently negative. A married man of thirty-four said, 'We always have problems. There are no rations in the house. There is always work to be done. I feel so helpless. Earlier I thought that I would be happy doing my own work; but now, being on my own, I am having a lot of problems.' Another man from Jaunpur said bitterly, 'Now I can't socialise or meet people. When all of us, my three brothers and I, were together, I had no cause to worry. After the separation, I am really anxious and troubled all the time.' All of these people believed that an urban lifestyle in a nuclear family, with salaried jobs instead of agriculture, would better their lives; the experience has proven otherwise, however.



Even with regard to freedom, it seems as though hopes of life in nuclear families are not being realised. Many women said, 'Yes, women break away because they want freedom. But in reality what happens? They get so bogged down with the work that they cannot even think

*(sadb hi nahi rahi)* of going out with their husbands, or cooking good food.' The general feeling of men was undoubtedly that families afforded more freedom, as one man said: 'My friend has recently broken away from his family, and I can see the change in him. He now has to rush back home before it is dark. Look at me: I am here talking to you, but I suffer no tension because I stay in a joint family.'

Furthermore, the majority of men appeared to suffer some vulnerability and loneliness after dividing into nuclear families, perhaps stemming from the fact that men are traditionally cast in the role of bread-winner. Many men between twenty-five and fifty expressed 'a terrifying feeling of having the ultimate responsibility.' In a joint family, the responsibility is shared by all (male) members of the household, and the feeling of togetherness gives them courage to cope with problems. One man aged forty-five powerfully stated, 'It is better to die than be divided from your brothers.'

<sup>1</sup> As said by a 12 year old boy from Tehri

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

*Roads came-our crops changed, so did our hearts<sup>1</sup>*

Joint families appear to have fewer children per couple on average than nuclear families. This needs to be recognised by governments and researchers alike, because the current misconception is that couples in nuclear families have fewer children. Our text-books and literature sometimes add to this confusion, as Sharma and Sharma<sup>2</sup> write: "... Since most of these families were joint families, every disabled child had more than one sibling in the same household. Although large families are considered a demographic bane, they certainly emerge as a strength for the disabled child."

The majority of children outside of the Tehri district prefer nuclear families, whereas those within Tehri prefer the joint family system. (It should be noted that this study concentrates more on the Jaunpur block of the Tehri district, which is remote and relatively free from the effects of urbanisation.) The slogan '*chota parivar sukhi parivar*' has caused much confusion in minds of the young (and sometimes even adults), who construe the message as one that advocates the nuclear family. The following extract from a Class 3 Hindi textbook<sup>3</sup>, prescribed in government schools under the U.P. board, adds to the confusion between large and joint families. It says (translated from Hindi):

"We can see clearly in our villages that people in large families can never be happy. The food from their fields is never sufficient for their needs. Children cannot do well in their studies because they have to work very hard from their childhood. But those who stay in small families can live happily, with even their small earnings and little work in the fields. Children from small families study well and are healthy."

This is the exact opposite of our findings in this study. It must be added here that, during our interviews, we were amazed by the complete faith shown by children (and often adults) in the printed word, especially in their textbooks and in newspapers. What is written in textbooks is taken as gospel truth, and believed without question and if things are also presented in a 'scientific manner' then the faith is almost unshakeable. Furthermore, many children from outside Tehri are greatly influenced by the media and show a strong desire for consumer goods.

<sup>1</sup> A 70 year old man from Nainital

<sup>2</sup> Sharma Neeraj and Sharma Bhanumati: "Children in Difficult Circumstances: Familial Co-relates of Advantage while at Risk," in *Culture, Socialisation and Human Development*, Ed. Saraswati T. S., Sage, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Gyan Bharti-class 3, "Basic Education Directorate," U.P. Board, 1999.



Concerning the preferences of adults, the responses varied according to their livelihood patterns, age, marital status and gender; the older and unmarried citizens preferring joint families, while the younger and married people advocated the nuclear family system. As an illustration, the people from Almora and Bageshwar are educated and completely dependent upon salaried jobs; they now live largely in nuclear families, and seem to be in a state of dilemma. Though the married women are often overworked (and consequently unhappy), they still choose the nuclear family system, while the men would prefer a joint family because they "do not feel alone there." Contrast this with the people from Nainital, who are dependent upon land but have shifted to growing cash crops, and are now more dependent on the market: in these families, both married men and women prefer the nuclear family system, do not suffer from any dilemmas, and clearly feel that the present is better than the past.



Our study has shown that, despite their widespread advantages, joint families are breaking up into nuclear families – even in the Tehri district, where the people depend upon land for their survival and literacy levels are comparatively low. The older men and women believe that significant changes in the family structures began some forty years ago, with the large-scale construction of roads in the hill areas after the Indo-Chinese war; a major shift from a non-monetary to a cash economy in the villages also started around this time. "The road came, our crops changed and our hearts changed," sums up the feelings of many who felt the roads had taken their young away.

The alarming pace at which joint families are breaking up today is a clear indication that some new factors are responsible for accelerating this break-up. Individualism is rising and tolerance is declining; both of these factors have aggravated the inter-personal problems that have always existed within families, often to the extent that a joint family breaks up. Through television advertising, people's aspirations of individual wealth are being raised, and competitive instincts trig-



gered. The nature of market is such that it thrives on competition – not just among producers, but also among the consumers themselves. Competition strikes at the very core of a joint family system.

In traditional societies, the family's cohesion was based upon the authority vested in the elders and the *mukhiya*, who were able to resolve disputes by managing to submerge individual identities in the interests of the family. *Mukhiyas* relied a lot on their traditional resources (e.g., what their ancestors did, on old sayings, folk tales, stories, precedents, etc.) for taking difficult decisions. Nowadays, these may seem arbitrary or even irrational at times, but they had a unique logic of their own: more importantly, they evidently worked in keeping the family together. Modern values have now eroded the authority of the *mukhiya*.



The need of women for freedom and privacy is another major cause of joint family disintegration; while the brothers have common blood ties, the wives come from different homes and do not have the same bonding. In

the words of an elderly man, "The wives are from different homes, different parents and different minds. They cannot feel as close to the family as the men will. Men can only help their wives to like their families better"; hence the need of the women to be alone with their husbands. With the education of women ever increasing, this aspect of privacy and individual freedom will have to be addressed if the joint family is to survive.

A very interesting finding of this study was that, contrary to our expectations, it is often the non-literate daughters-in-law who want to opt out of a joint family, rather than the literate ones. They often feel

that they end up doing far more work than the literate *babus* (daughters-in-law), but do not get commensurate respect or appreciation for it, since the literate women are clever at making "sweet talk." This is shown to be true by the fact that the mothers-in-law are often quite in awe of the literate *babu*, despite some critical remarks about laziness and appearances. It is also true that the majority of men and women appear keen on getting literate brides for their sons.

The aftermath of a joint family breaking up can be devastating. The people of Tehri who have broken away from their joint homes all feel that times have become much worse, and that they were far wealthier and happier before because they were together. However, they feel they can do nothing to stop the changing trend, however, since the practical difficulties of reuniting as a joint family are seen to be insurmountable.



*"A joint family needs one television, but if the family breaks up into three nuclear families, then it needs three televisions. Who gets richer? The shopkeeper. We will get poorer"*

*(A 10-year-old child from Tehri)*

## Case study

Nain Singh Sajwan is 35 years old, and comes from Jaunpur in Tehri. He has three children, and works as a labourer. His wife looks after the house and children, and also works in the fields; but their land yields food sufficient for only one or two months. Eight years ago, the couple separated from a joint household of four married brothers. Before the break-up, their family was among the most prosperous in the village. Nain Singh narrates the story: "We were known as the *seths* (rich people) in our village, while all of us lived together. Everything was going well. We had cattle, oxen, buffaloes, cow sheds, trees, a large house – everything. We owned three *gharats* [water mills]. Ten years ago, some of the land we owned came under *doob chehra* [land requisitioned by the government for the construction of dams]. We got money as compensation. We all got money, but our eldest brother kept a bigger share for himself. It created problems: as soon as we got the money, we brothers began to look at one another with suspicion. I agreed to separate because of the money I had received. There was no major



quarrel among the women in the house. At first, all was well, but within a few months of the separation we began to face a lot of problems. Today I have many worries. If we had not got the money at that time, our family could have been saved from separation, destruction and poverty. No man can do anything worthwhile if he is alone – he will only get into trouble."



## CLOSING REMARKS



This study has revealed that joint families maintain equality while nuclear families lead to disparity in society. By and large, the joint families have 'enough food and clothes for all' but may not have 'good' food and 'good' clothes for each member. It may be that larger studies confirm that, in rural areas, joint families are better off in most respects, even though they may have their own particular set of problems.

Both this study and *A Matter of Quality* have conclusively shown that instead of developing analytical and critical skills, modern schools succeed in replacing the old values and beliefs with new and alien ones. This erodes the confidence and self-esteem of the children and ultimately demoralises society by disparaging all that is one's own – be it the lifestyle, clothes, language, food, occupations, manner of thinking, local knowledge etc. – and creating a divide between the school and the home. The children start coveting and imitating all that is western/urban, under the mistaken belief that it will make them 'developed' and 'modern'.

To regain the strength of our society, we need to restore the self-esteem of our children. This can be done by giving them confidence in their own traditions. This is difficult because modern education has mesmerised everyone to such an extent that only certain ways of thinking are considered as 'rational' and 'scientific', while the rest are regarded as superstitious or unscientific; only certain things are progressive, while the rest are 'backward'. Therefore to rebuild our indigenous strengths, it is essential that we systematically challenge the symbols of 'modernity' in order to reclaim the place usurped by the ideas from modern education. It is only when the children are freed from these ideas that they can find their roots, correct their mistakes and realise their strengths.

We therefore need to make an assessment of the problems created by the modern schooling system. It is not just the textbooks but also the values upheld by the school teachers and their administrative bureaucracy that get communicated to children in schools. These issues need to be investigated, and steps taken to repair the damage.

We need to conduct a critical analysis of primary and secondary school textbooks at the national level, to ascertain the impact of the damage done to rural lifestyles and the confidence of the people, and make appropriate corrections.



If our textbooks can have stories which show the *mullah* or the *pundit* or the *sadhu* as a charlatan, then we should similarly have some stories where lawyers, doctors, bureaucrats and scientists are also shown to cheat people. We can show that frauds and good people exist in every profession, which will help restore the balance. For instance in one of the Hindi textbooks of class 3, there is a picture alongside a text which depicts Mr. Singh as a person who is shown walking with a dog and a stick, wearing a suit—all these being obvious symbols of the educated and the affluent, while his *mali* (gardener) called *Budhua* is shown wearing a *dhoti*—which is obviously a symbol for the not educated, and the poor in the eyes of the textbook writer. It is important to see how distorted values can be imparted to children even in one such picture (and the accompanying text). If our textbooks show a clean house as one where there is no cow, and a dirty house as having a cow and cow dung. This gives a very strong message to our rural children to refrain from farming and keeping a cow.

To restore the balance in a society that is getting completely mesmerised by the concept of modernity, the children must also be encouraged to understand that ‘science also makes mistakes’. There are endless examples of medicines that have been banned after fresh discoveries. These can be brought to the attention of children to show that the modern medical system is not flawless. A large number of diseases are themselves caused by the modern medical system. Technologies like fertilisers or pesticides can also have adverse side effects.

The children must learn to make distinctions: for instance, between *saksharta* (literacy) and *shiksha* (the closest translation would be education); between *sukh* (happiness, contentment, peace etc.) and *suvidha* (convenience); between *lakshya* (objective e.g. *sukh*) and *madhyam* (medium e.g., conveniences, money etc.); between ‘opposite’ and ‘different’. Children need to be taught that there is not always an either/or, yes/no, or black/white situation, and that things are more often ‘different’ rather than ‘opposite.’ These ideas need to be incorporated into the current curriculum.

There is a general mistrust of traditional systems of knowledge today that is slowly depriving us of all diversity; if a particular way of thinking is not ‘scientific’ then it is seen as irrational or superstitious. The result is that all traditional knowledge, even though much of it is functional and living, is being disregarded. Ultimately, the root of the problem is really the concept of ‘development’ that is being actively taught and perpetuated by the modern system of education. We have seen how a literate child starts looking down upon physical work in the fields as ‘inferior’, and aspires to a ‘superior’ white-collar job; how the literate son and daughter-in-law are also becoming averse to working in the fields or other traditional occupations; and how this has adversely affected the rural mountain economy. Increasing urbanisation and education in rural areas has made the educated people poorer and less happy. Perhaps we should heed a wise woman’s advice when she says, “If education is so powerful, let us use it to show a way out of this trap.” We can certainly think about it.



Today, when poverty and unemployment are two of the most pressing problems of society, we need to acknowledge the benefits of the joint family system and traditional occupations. Despite acute deprivation in some areas, children in joint families are more resilient and better off because they have the support of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, who are an integral part of the traditional Indian family. The modern economists should look into this carefully, even if it threatens their implicit faith in the market. In fact, even in the urbanised West the connections between poverty and family are now clear. Americans have realised that poverty is affected more by marriage (or rather, the lack of it) than race or unemployment; the 'marriage divide' separates richer, better educated, married couples from poorer, less educated and single-parent families. This led to specific welfare reforms in 1996, which "made marriage an explicit policy goal, rewarded states that lowered out-of-wedlock-births and created disincentives to single mothers on welfare."<sup>1</sup> This in turn resulted in reducing the proportion of American children living below poverty line to sixteen per cent in 1999. Today Americans are celebrating the fact that, perhaps due to their reforms, their "traditional nuclear family" is showing signs of recovery. Perhaps our policy makers could come up with similar reforms to arrest the disintegration of the joint family in rural areas.

Westernisation, which we call modernity, has imposed certain views that promote individuality. These are in conflict with the deeply ingrained beliefs of our traditional society, where individuals co-exist with nature and other beings, including members of the family and the wider community. As Jai Prakash Narain, a well known Indian leader said, we used to see an individual as a "living cell in a larger organic entity," not as a "particle of sand in an inorganic heap." We gave priority to the community, which is why in our culture the responsibility of an individual was towards their family and community. There was no conflict between rights and responsibility, but the rights of an individual were bestowed by the community and arose from responsibility. The modern values, based on the concept of individual rights and freedom, do not take this into account, however. To quote Sharma and Sharma<sup>2</sup>, the problem is this: "the need of an educated person to seek individual autonomy, though quite in tune with contemporary democratic ideology, clashes with the cultural ethos of 'family first'."

The least we can do is acknowledge and empathise with the majority of our people who are in such a state of confusion between these two world-views. They say, "The joint family is a matter of pride for the village (*gaon ki shauh*) but a nuclear family is considered selfish and living only for its own pleasure." We live in a country where, in some areas like Tehri, it is still possible for a total stranger to receive food and shelter for more than a month without being questioned; where people, animals, forests and other aspects of nature are truly valued and treated with respect. On the other hand, in those same rural areas, increased education, aspirations and unemployment are making people poorer and demoralised. Re-valuing and reviving the traditional family systems, although necessitating steps to be taken at the policy level, would certainly uplift the rural economy. The child who is at the tail end of this chain would also surely benefit. As it stands, we can only watch while a whole society becomes more and more wretched.

<sup>1</sup>The Economist 28 July-3 August 2001: "At last Good News on the Family."

<sup>2</sup>Sharma Neeraj and Sharma Bhanumati "Children in Difficult Circumstances: Familial Co-relates of Advantage and/or Risk," in *Culture, Socialisation and Human Development*, Ed. Saraswati T. S., Sage, 1999

## METHODOLOGY

### *Area background and sample groups*

Out of 13 districts in the state of Uttarakhand the following five regions were chosen for the study (see map):

- district of Tehri – Jaunpur and Bhilangana blocks
- district of Nainital – Dhari block
- district of Pithoragarh – Dharchula block
- district of Almorah – Takula block
- district of Bageshwar – Garur block

The livelihoods of the residents of these areas are distinct from each other in the following ways:

- Traditional agriculture: in the Bhilangana block, people still follow the traditional pattern of agriculture.
- Cash-crops: in the Dhar block, people rely completely upon cash crops.
- Tribal areas with jobs and trade: in the Dharchula block people rely entirely upon trade and jobs.
- Jobs and urbanisation: in the Takula and Garur blocks, people are dependent on jobs in urban centres.
- Tribal culture: In Jaunpur block the people have a cultural identity distinct from the rest of the state, rich traditions and an economy based on agriculture and animal husbandry.

Both caste and class factors were kept in mind while choosing households; when interviewing individuals, variables such as age, sex, literacy and life experience were considered. From each area we chose large and small villages placed at varying distances from the road. The population, household, literacy rate, caste, class, livelihood patterns and other distinguishing features of each area were noted (see Appendix 1).

### *Pilot study*

To illustrate the functional differences between joint families and nuclear families, a team of 72 children from the Jaunpur region was enrolled as researchers during a pilot study who conducted a survey by talking to their family members, a total of 350 adults. From the responses, the following distinguishing features between the family types emerged:

- Whether the head of the household controlled the flow of cash, (If the members give their earnings to the head of the household).
- Whether the kitchen *chulha* (stove) was together or separate.
- Whether the land was divided or undivided.
- Whether the members lived together in the same dwelling.

Also, it is necessary to decide how the material wealth of a given family should be measured, since not all operate within a monetary economy. To this end, we have taken a broad definition arising from the views of the villagers during discussions, which included: the presence (or absence) and condition of resources such as a house, land, cattle, a cow shed, jewellery and food grains; annual income; a vehicle and items in the house such as a television and furniture.

### *Implementation of field strategy*

Data were collected in three phases, concentrating on:

- the effects of family structure on children
- the perspectives of adults towards joint and nuclear families,
- quantitative data on family size and structure.

To elicit responses from the children, the team felt that some different techniques were needed; thus the following methods were decided upon: Focused Group Discussions (FGDs); a questionnaire; a survey; interviews with children, teachers and parents; role-play; drawing; story writing; and observation. A questionnaire for children and a teachers' report were formulated, and administered to 1,093 children and 57 teachers. Among smaller groups of children, qualitative methods such as FGDs, role-plays, story writing and drawing were also used. Interviews with parents and a survey of school drop-outs were also conducted.



For gathering data from adults, the primary methods used were interviews and FGDs. A list of indirect questions regarding their families was produced, and a detailed format to elicit information given (see Appendices). Along with the qualitative data, an economic analysis of the wealth of each household in seven villages of the Jaunpur block (Tehsil district) was also conducted. The indications of wealth were decided by the village communities, and are among those shown earlier. A value was given to each of these parameters through general consensus; based upon these values, an assessment of the wealth and total expenditure of each person in the family was carried out.

To help ascertain the changing trends in family systems, two further sets of data were collected. A small but detailed survey of 30 villages in Uttaranchal was conducted to find out the number of children per couple living in each family. In addition, another survey in 25 villages of the Tehsil district was carried out to see how the proportion of joint and nuclear families living there has changed over the last forty years.

For details of the sample groups used during each phase, see Appendix 2.

### **Orientation and training of the research team**

We are aware that each member of the research team had their own prejudices and notions regarding family types and other related issues so conducted various internal discussions and exercises in order to minimise their effect. Above all, we understood that the communities in which we worked were better informed than us; thus we should go into the field with a genuine desire to learn from them. The team was also accustomed to working with children, who provided valuable insights into their communities. In addition, each member participated in a refresher course on qualitative research methods.<sup>1</sup> For more details, see Appendix 3.

<sup>1</sup> Details available on request.

<sup>2</sup> The course included the following sessions:

- training in Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview techniques;
- techniques of working with children as researchers, including the use of drawing, role-plays, story writing etc. to elicit responses;
- using different types of questions, in particular open-ended questions, in order to maintain a level of spontaneity and originality in the responses;
- identifying and analysing ambiguities and contradictions in the data;
- the importance of direct observations of surroundings, living conditions and behaviour;
- recording various types of data;
- reviewing the project at every stage, to ensure that the main objectives are achieved.

### **PILOT STUDY**

To verify the worth of this study, a field test in the village of Nautha in the Jaunpur block was carried out. Among several important observations were the following:

1. The social unit *bhayat*, or brotherhood, is very influential, and is involved in almost every major decision in the village.
2. People from joint families have time for rest and leisure, while those from nuclear families do not seem to have this time.
3. Many complaints were made about the indolence of younger children, both boys and girls, who appeared not to do any work, in sharp contrast to days gone by. Although there did not seem to be a concrete reason for dissatisfaction, some blamed the schools, while others blamed the changing times.
4. The "capacity to do hard work" is considered by the large majority to be the most important qualification of a bride.
5. Some elderly women said that even if the young brides were not literate, all of them had changed their style of dress. "If they wore old *ghagra* (traditional long skirts), it would indicate a readiness to do all work. But when they dress in clean and fancy clothes they are giving us a clear message. It means we cannot even ask them. (*Jab suit pahari kar baibegi to kya kahenge?*)" This quote illustrates the subtle modes of communication that still exist in the traditional societies.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been a number of articles written that show the importance of family life for the well being of children. As early as 1937, Prof. T.C. Hodson<sup>1</sup> said that the joint family "was in effect a social bulwark, and India's provision against unemployment and penury... The joint family, when it was bound together by unquestioning loyalty to its head, was an admirable substitute for universal insurance; it provided for every member and even secured for those whose abilities were mediocre the certainty of ungrudging maintenance."

More recently, Sharma and Sharma<sup>2</sup> in their article have cited Rao who reported lesser burdens experienced by (joint) families in rural areas who looked after schizophrenic patients. In the same article, Phoolka's study also highlights the strengths in the size of the family: despite their low socio-economic status, the majority of the families having a nurturing climate (23 out of 30 were joint families). Many more such studies have been cited in this article like a longitudinal study of high-risk children by Werner and Smith who have reported that children who grew up to be competent, confident and caring were nurtured by substitute parents like grandparents or neighbours; Pal who worked with autistic children using a case-study approach and concluded, "the children's home is the most crucial variable in determining their present functioning and prognosis in future;" Nunes who did a study with children in stressful situations and found that positive experiences in the family during the formative years prevent the child from being at risk and help them cope with stress; Kapur, Pal and Phoolka who investigated the area of childhood disability have shown the significance of a familial affection network in the development and prognosis of children; Mishra, Roland and Radha Paul who have shown that a low socio-economic status need not necessarily mean predisposing a child to risk. Despite poor socio-economic levels, the caring behaviour of mothers and a high value placed upon children within the culture serve as mitigating factors.

Sharma and Sharma's own findings were based on studies of children growing up under difficult circumstances in and around Delhi. In their research data of twenty-one studies over the last eleven years, they found that children "encircled in their familial network seemed to be coping far better than those who were deprived." It was also found that the mother emerged as the major source of resilience and strength, and the prominent figure in sustaining and fostering the child's mental health.

Evidence from cross-cultural studies conducted in the West has also shown that children living in a relationship-centred culture enjoy obvious advantages over those that do not. Saraswati<sup>3</sup> has quoted Garbarino in her article who has commented on the deterioration of the social environment in cities in the USA, and has drawn a parallel between physical toxicity that causes environmental degradation resulting in health problems, and "social toxicity." As the social environment becomes more toxic, it is the children who are most vulnerable, in whom the effects are seen first, and who accumulate the most developmental risk factors, which include "being from a single parent family, poverty, racism, drug addiction or alcoholism, trauma from violence, and emotional problems that impair parenting."

The Western governments are now re-examining families, but only because there are great costs involved. Murthy<sup>4</sup> has quoted Leff when he comments, "Our problem in the West is that somehow or other we have to make up for the families who have disappeared, and create a supportive structure—not for the patients, but for the single relatives who are often desperately trying to cope with schizophrenia. It is of course very expensive to create a network of professionals who act as a surrogate family, but we have to provide that form of support because it is even more expensive to keep hospitalising patients." It looks as though it is the rising monetary cost, rather than the social toxicity factor, which is compelling the West to address these issues.



<sup>1</sup> Hodson T. C. *India Census Philology: 1901-1931* Govt. Of India Press, 1937

<sup>2</sup> Sharma Neena and Sharma Bhagwati "Children in Difficult Circumstances: Familial Correlates of Advantage while at Risk," in *Culture, Socialisation and Human Development* Ed. Saraswati T.S., Sage, 1999

<sup>3</sup> Saraswati T.S., introduction of *Culture, Socialisation and Human Development*, Sage, 1999

<sup>4</sup> Murthy Srinivas R. "Socialisation and Mental Health in India" in *Culture, Socialisation and Human Development*, Ed. By Saraswati T.S., Sage, 1999



## Appendix 1: Distinguishing features of each area chosen for study

### *Tehri district – Jaunpur block*

*Reason for choosing: Tribal Area, traditional livelihood.*

The Jaunpur block of the Tehri district is a tribal area with a cultural identity distinct from the rest of Uttarakhand. However, officially they do not have tribal status; hence no government jobs are reserved for them. The economy in the rural area is largely based upon agriculture and animal husbandry. The most common produce is maize. This area was chosen for study because:

- It has rich traditions and has retained a lot of traditional systems.
- The economy is largely land-based (agriculture and animal husbandry).
- Low literacy, low migration.
- SIDH has a long association with the place and a good rapport with the people.

Three villages were chosen: Jinsi, Banglon ki Kandi and Thal.

- a) Jinsi: a small village, 4km from the motor road and about 8km from Mussoorie, a popular hill station. The majority of the residents are from scheduled castes.
- b) Banglon ki Kandi: a large village near the motor road, where residents are of mixed caste. It is very close (3.5 km.) to Kempty Falls, a popular tourist spot. People are in a transition point from traditional occupation to catering to tourists.
- c) Thal: a medium-sized village, 2.5km from the motor road. Most of the people in the village are involved in traditional agriculture and animal husbandry.

### *Tehri district: Bhalangana block*

*Reasons for choosing: Traditional agriculture*

This area is popularly known as Balganga over valley located in the Bhalangana block of the Tehri Garhwal district. It was chosen because:

- This valley was historically known as the most fertile area in the entire Tehri *rajat* (kingdom), and even today is renowned for examples of sustainable agriculture based on traditional patterns.
- It represents a diversity of traditional agriculture and agro-pastoralism, and therefore traditional lifestyles. It has tremendous diversity in topography, ranging from 1000 meters down by the river to 5000 meters in the Salraasthal Tal area, far above the tree line.

The three villages chosen represented three distinct types:

- a) *Gewar*: represents villages that are remote, inaccessible, and located in the mid to high altitude range. The spread of education is limited and migration is extremely low. There is a complete absence of any elite class.
- b) *Kont-Bamgaon*: represents fairly accessible villages located in the mid altitude range. There is a complete stagnation and degradation of the overall village economy. The reach of education and exposure to urban influences is fairly high. The beginnings of an elite class are evident.
- c) *Srikot*: represents totally accessible villages by the roadside, located in fertile valleys. The reach of education and exposure to urban influences is extremely high. There is an elite class, mostly contractors who have settled there recently.

### *Nainital district: Dhari block*

*Reason for choosing: Cash crops*

All of the people are engaged in growing cash crops like potatoes, peas, tomatoes and apples.

- a) Saliyot: Near the motor road. Out of 88 families, 87 are of scheduled caste.
- b) Nagai: A small village, about 4-5 km. from the motor road, which has 22 Brahmin families.
- c) Managhar: Near the motor road, with mixed caste (18 caste groups) and a high literacy rate. All earn their livelihood through agriculture.

### *Almora District: Takula block (Someswar area)*

*Reason for choosing: Jobs and urbanisation.*

- a) Lveshal gaon (in the Kausani area, known for tourism): A large village (80 families), near the road, with a high impact of market and tourism.
- b) Meltingaon (in the Someswar area): Has traditional agriculture and also potato as a cash crop. This is a small village (26 families) with a majority of Brahmin families, 1.5 km. from the motor road, and with a high level of youth migration.

*Bageshwar district: Garur block*

*Reason for choosing: Jobs and exhaustion.*

a) Naugaon: A large village (95 families) about 2 km. from the motor road. Mainly Rajput families, and some scheduled caste families. Most families are employed and there is traditional agriculture.

*Pithoragarh district: Dharchula area*

*Reason for choosing: Jobs and Trading.*

This is a tribal area which has Scheduled Tribe status, and hence reservation in government jobs. The main sources of income are trade with Nepal and jobs in cities.

a) Pangar: A 'developed' village where the people are engaged in agriculture and construction activities, and are also employed in jobs. The first village encountered as one enters the Chaudasa valley.

b) Sosa: Near the motor road, where people are employed and engaged in trade. There are hotels and shops.

c) Sirva: A small village 6 km. from the motor road. Agriculture and trade are the main occupations. Compared to other villages, it has fewer people employed in jobs.

## Appendix 2: Details of sample groups used during Phases 1 and 2

### Phase 1

Total no. of children who filled in questionnaires: 1093

Total no. of teachers who assessed the children: 57

Total no. of children engaged in conducting research: 72

### Phase 2

Area	No. villages	Total No. families	No. joint families	No. nuclear families
Jaunpur	12	204	48	156
Balganga Ghari	5	425	51	374
Dhari	6	468	65	403
Takula	2	106	6	100
Garur	1	95	1	94
Dharchula	2	145	17	128
TOTAL	28	1443	188	1255

No. Interviews:	Male	Female	Children	Family	Joint family	Nuclear family
	124	129	1093	150	49	110

### Cross-section of the participants:

	No. males	No. females
Literate	104	60
Non-literate	20	69
Belonging to upper caste	93	89
Belonging to scheduled caste	19	26
Belonging to scheduled tribe	12	14
Married	97	100
Unmarried	27	29
15-25 years old	32	53
25-50 years old	39	39
Over 50 years old	54	36



### Appendix 3: Orientation and training of the research team

#### Management of raw data

The team had to be trained to record and organise raw data from FGDs and interviews. This included: the importance of debriefing after each interview or discussion; making a holistic picture from the recorded interviews; FGDs; non-verbal communication; intuitive insights such as hunches and feelings; and direct observations of surroundings, living conditions and behaviour. Mini cassette recorders were issued to each member for recording interviews in the field. Each team member was also given an exercise book so that they could record their observations of the key issues, and note down keywords and interesting quotations from the children and adults. One team member was specifically assigned the task of noting down the proceedings of all of the team meetings and discussions, as part of documenting the entire research process from start to finish. This was to make the process clear to researchers and scholars involved in this type of work.

#### Supervision and review

Supervision and review were built into the research process through regular team meetings (weekly whenever possible), where progress, learning, insights, problems, gaps in understanding, and suggestions were discussed and deliberated upon. At each stage, presentations were made to senior SIDH staff members with research experience, and their feedback and suggestions gathered. Each team member was required to submit their strategies, estimate how much time their fieldwork would take, and justify their selection of areas and villages for fieldwork. Brainstorming sessions were also held when required. There were several sessions when gaps were identified or new insights led to new questions.

### Appendix 4: Economic survey of families from seven villages in Jaunpur, Tehri

#### Village

Name of Villages	Total no. of family	No. of Jt. family	No. of nuclear family	Prosperous family			Poor family		
				Total	Joint	Nuclear	Total	Joint	Nuclear
Sairji	26	11	15	6	5	1	4	0	4
Bel Talla	17	10	7	4	4	0	5	0	5
Bel Malla	17	8	9	5	4	1	6	0	6
Parogi	13	5	8	3	3	0	4	0	4
Sadab Talla	34	12	22	5	4	1	5	0	5
Kandi Talli	21	11	10	4	4	0	5	0	5
Kandi Malla	22	8	14	5	5	0	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>31</b>

The above table shows that in the seven villages, all the poor families are nuclear families, and majority of the well-off families are joint families. Also, twenty-nine out of sixty-five joint families (i.e. 44%) are wealthy, compared to only three out of eighty-five nuclear families (4%) are wealthy. None of the joint families are poor, while thirty-one nuclear families (36%) are poor. An assessment of all of the assets of the households was done, and a value put to each asset, to calculate the asset value per capita. It was revealed that the average asset value per capita in a joint family is Rs. 31,797; while in a nuclear family it is Rs. 21,435. The cash expenditure per person on purchasing various items (from the market) in both types of family was also estimated. In a joint family, the per capita monthly outgoings were found to be Rs. 244, compared to Rs. 336 in a nuclear family.



## Appendix 5: Distribution of children per couple in families from thirty villages across Uttarakhand

	Total Families	Joint families	Nuclear families	Couples in joint families	Couples in nuclear families
	932	213 (23.6%)	689 (75.4%)	725	948
Total No. of couples	1673				
with 4+ children		279 (38.5%)	415 (43.8%)		
with 3 children		129 (17.8%)	183 (19.3%)		
with 1 or 2 children		230 (31.7%)	262 (27.6%)		
with 0 children		87 (12.0%)	88 (9.3%)		

The above table reveals that the average number of children per couple in a joint family (3.0) is in fact less than that in a nuclear family (3.4). In nuclear families, 44% of couples had four or more children, as compared to 38% in joint families; 63% of couples in nuclear families had more than two children, as compared to 56% in joint families. The proportion of couples having no children at all was 12% in joint families, and 9% in nuclear families.

## Appendix 6: Groups of people favouring one family type over the other

Groups preferring the joint family system:

- the majority of children (all the girls and majority of the boys) from the Tehri district
- all males and females above fifty from all five districts
- the majority of married males from 25-50 years of age from the Bageshwar, Almora and Tehri districts
- the majority of unmarried males from 15-25 years of age from the Nainital, Bageshwar, Almora and Tehri districts
- the majority of married females from 25-50 years of age from Tehri
- the majority of unmarried females from 15-25 years of age from Pithoragarh, Bageshwar, Almora and Tehri

Groups preferring the nuclear family system:

- the majority of the children – both boys and girls – from Pithoragarh, Nainital, Bageshwar and Almora
- the majority of married males from 25-50 years of age from the Pithoragarh and Nainital districts
- all young boys from 15-25 years of age from the Pithoragarh district
- the majority of married females from 25-50 years of age from Pithoragarh, Nainital, Bageshwar and Almora
- all young girls from 15-25 years of age from the Nainital district

## Preferences for joint and nuclear families

District	Children		Men						Women					
	Jt.	Nuclear	Jt.			Nuclear			Jt.			Nuclear		
			50+	25-50	15-25	50+	25-50	15-25	50+	25-50	15-25	50+	25-50	15-25
Pithoragarh		#	#				#	#	#		#		#	
Nainital		#	#		#		#		#				#	#
Bageshwar		#	#	#	#				#		#		#	
Almora		#	#	#	#				#		#		#	
Tehri	#		#	#	#				#	#	#			



# पाठकों की ओर से

मेरे मन में परिवार, और वह भी संयुक्त परिवार, के महत्व के बारे में कभी शंका नहीं रही है। इस रिपोर्ट से उसकी पुष्टि हुई है। आज की भोगवादी संस्कृति ने व्यक्ति को स्व-केंद्रित और स्वार्थी बना दिया है। व्यक्ति का समग्र विकास और सुरक्षा परस्पर सहयोग और प्रेम के वातावरण में ही संभव है, होड़ या प्रतिस्पर्धा के वातावरण में नहीं। आज तो प्रतिस्पर्धा, कमजोर को पीछे धकेलकर आगे बढ़ना, यही जीवन का उद्देश्य हो गया है। वर्तमान शिक्षा भी इसी सत्य को प्रोत्साहन देती है। इसके कारण ही आज समाज छिन्न-भिन्न हो रहा है, परिवार टूट रहे हैं, गांव टूट ही गये हैं, अब देश भी टूटने के कगार पर है।

(सिद्धराज ढड्डा, जयपुर)

यदि मैं एक संयुक्त परिवार का सदस्य नहीं होता तो शायद मेरे सघर्ष अपनी व्यक्तिगत बेहतरी के लिए होते, मैं वे सारे काम नहीं कर पाता, जो कर सका हूँ। अतः यदि मेरे अनुभव को प्रमाणिक माना जाये तो आपका अध्ययन सिर्फ ऊँचक समाज के लिए ही नहीं, सामान्य भारतीय समाज के लिए भी पुष्ट होता है।

(राजीव लोचन साह, सम्पादक, नैनीताल समाचार)

मेरे स्वयं अपने व्यक्तित्व में जितना अपने बाबाजी और दादीजी से पाया उसका आधा भी माता-पिता से नहीं — संयुक्त परिवार मेरे विचार से भी एक संयुक्त सहनशील व्यक्तित्व के निर्माण में सहायक होता है।

(गुरु दास अग्रवाल, चित्रकूट, जिला सतना)



# READER'S REVIEWS

It is just possible that this book fascinated me more as I am a typical product of a rural joint family. It not only ensures more social security than its counterpart (nuclear family), it also fosters among the children the qualities of fellow-feeling and large-heartedness.

*(Rabi Ray, Former Speaker, Lok Sabha)*

I think this is a new beginning in the artificial development-oriented social mind set.

Oral education imparted by grand parents is more durable and more capable of activating creativity in a child. In the absence of such an oral educational content, the development of a child is hampered. The joint family is not merely a large family, but has a pleasant atmosphere of mutual dependence and unity of purpose expressed in different but meaningfully complimentary ways. It is only in a joint family that a child can be initiated into the attitude of caring for others.

*(Pt. Vidya Nivas Misra, former VC Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi)*

Your study highlights the healthy impact of our age-old joint family system on all its members, the weaker and the needy ones in particular. I agree with most of the findings of the utility of joint families in the rural settings as well as their fast deterioration due to urban impact.

To me it appears that the Western concept of privacy and the growing tendency to spend the entire earnings on one's own family exclusively, without sharing with other units of the joint family, has struck at the very roots of this system.

*(Ranavir Rangra, New Delhi)*

Joint family is a precondition for prosperity in a rural agrarian economy as a nuclear family leads to impoverishment not only of the family but also of the entire community, according to a study, conducted by the Society for Integrated Development of Himalayas (SIDH). The study found a direct co-relation between drop-outs and the type of family they came from, (18 of the 238 children were drop-outs and all of them were from nuclear families). Also, most parents and guardians expressed the view that children study better in joint families.

*(The Hindu, August 23, 2002)*



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